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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE HOME DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM IN

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REACHING RURAL PEOPLE AND IN MEETING THEIR NEEDS /1

1946

Studies have been made as an attempt to determine how effectively the Home Demonstration Extension program is - (1) reaching rural people; and (2) meeting their needs. They center about five questions:

1. What is the relative proportion of rural homemakers who are, and who are not participating in the home demonstration program?
2. How do participating homemakers differ from those with whom the program has no direct contact?
3. What are the reasons for nonparticipation of homemakers?
4. What is the relative effectiveness of each of the various methods used in the home demonstration program for reaching rural families?
5. What are the needs of rural people? How effectively is the home demonstration program meeting these needs?

In collecting data summarized here for the first four questions, 1,037 homes were visited in 18 representative communities of four States -- Massachusetts, Washington, South Carolina, and Indiana, covering the period 1936 to 1940.

In studying the needs of rural people (Question 5 above), in addition to the home-to-home surveys in South Carolina and Indiana, a survey-by-letter was conducted with rural homemakers and rural leaders, in 1939, and over 1,000 letters were received, classified, and studied.

Proportion of Homemakers Participating in the Home Demonstration Extension Programs

It was found that 60 percent of the homes visited had one or more members participating in the Extension program. Of the homemakers interviewed,

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a little more than half (55%) were participating or had participated in Extension activities; 45 percent were not participating in extension activities and never had.

Characteristics of Participating and Nonparticipating Homemakers

The average social and economic level of participating homemakers was found to be somewhat higher than that of the nonparticipating homemakers. In general, their families have a slightly higher net income, more of them own radios and automobiles, more of them live on improved roads, and more of them own their own homes.

However, the families of participating and nonparticipating homemakers were found not neatly divided economically into an upper two-thirds who are reached by the extension program and a lower one-third who are not reached. It was found that economically the families of homemakers who are or have been participating are very much like the families of those who are not participants. In fact, more than one-half of the participating homemakers had estimated incomes of less than \$500 per year for family living.

The Most Important Factors Determining Participation

The two most important factors which determine participation are not directly economic. They are - (1) education of the homemaker; (2) her ability to get to meetings.

A higher percentage of the homemakers who were participating in the Extension program had gone through one or more grades of high school and twice as many of the participants than of the nonparticipants could drive a car.

Judging from all the factors gathered, although the participating homemakers seem better able to make use of their opportunities, it seems equally true that the cooperative home demonstration program serves the lower one-third as well as the upper two-thirds of the rural population.

Reasons for Nonparticipation of Homemakers

Of the 45 percent nonparticipating homemakers, nearly half (in the opinion of the interviewers) could become reasonably good participants.

The studies in each of the four States showed fundamentally the same reasons for nonparticipation. The reasons most frequently given were -

- Lack of transportation
- Poor health of the homemaker
- Unfamiliarity with Extension activities
- Lack of interest in group meetings or organizations of any kind
- Lack of someone to care for small children
(23 percent of the nonparticipants were under 30 years of age in contrast to 16 percent of the participants)
- Lack of contact with extension club or group.

Of these reasons, only the condition of poor health admits of no practical remedy. Suggestions for coping with the other causes of nonparticipation will be found in the recommendations.

Relative Effectiveness of Methods Used

Intelligent change of practices in the home as a result of home demonstration activities is used in this study as a means for determining the relative effectiveness of the various methods used by the Extension Service in reaching rural families. In the areas studied the method demonstration and bulletins were the most successful means of bringing about changes of practice.

The method demonstration seems to have influenced the adoption of 44 practices out of every 100 changed. Bulletins are credited with 18 percent of the practices changed, and general meetings with 8 percent. Indirect influence, circular letters, and junior result demonstrations were also among the more effective methods.

In interpreting the data on relative influence of teaching methods, however, it is well to keep in mind the inter-relationship of the various means and agencies used, and that the total outcome of the extension program is more important than the results from any particular unit of teaching effort.

Of the participating homemakers interviewed, 60 percent reported changing practices as a result of extension activities, - an average of 3.7 practices changed per home.

Contact With Extension Activities as Related to Changing of Practices

Seventy-nine percent of all the homemakers interviewed had in some way been exposed to extension information. It appears that the degree to which rural people are exposed to the various means used in disseminating extension information largely determines their acceptance of recommended practices.

The ratio of "takes" to "exposures" was high for method demonstrations meetings, bulletins, indirect influence, adult and junior result demonstrations, leader-training meetings, general meetings, home visits and circular letters.

The ratio of "takes" to "exposures" was low for extension schools, news stories, exhibits, office calls, and radio.

It appears that extension methods used are just as effective with the lower income and less educated homemakers as with the ones of higher income and better education; and that neither income nor the amount of formal schooling need be barriers to the adoption of practices.

However, teaching methods used in home demonstration work failed to secure the participation of 45 percent of the rural homemakers interviewed, though it undoubtedly brought information of value to some of them. It is possible these homemakers did not participate because the program was not primarily concerned with the needs they were constantly forced to meet.

The Needs of Rural Families

It is necessary to know what the needs of rural people are, in order to learn to what extent the home demonstration extension program is meeting these needs. Home-to-home surveys in South Carolina and Indiana, and a survey-by-letter showed a fairly uniform opinion of rural people in regard to the needs of rural families.

The expressed needs of people, however, are of two kinds - desires and lacks. Both are important but it was necessary to distinguish between them. After finding what needs were felt by the people surveyed, it was necessary to compare them with the factual evidence regarding the conditions and possessions of rural people before drawing conclusions regarding their needs. The study on needs then, deals with the opinions of rural people in regard to their needs and the test of the validity of those opinions by a comparison with facts, largely from statistical sources, regarding the condition under which rural people live.

A larger income was considered the greatest need. After this came the need of better management of their time, resources, and money; of better health - including need of better diet, of medical and dental care, hospitalization, and better housing.

Frequently mentioned, also were the needs for better community life - including need of better rural churches and guidance from rural churches, for better family life, for better opportunity for youth; for better recreation; and for better rural schools.

Statistical and other objective material show that the opinions expressed by these rural people regarding their needs are well justified.

Extent to Which the Extension Home Demonstration Program
is Meeting the Needs of Rural People

The general objectives of the home demonstration program are broad enough to cover most of the expressed needs of rural people. The Extension Service, like most other educational organizations, has unfortunately not been able to make its accomplishments reach its objectives. Limited personnel and heavy agent-loads- (approximately 900 rural families per home demonstration agent) - undoubtedly account in part for this situation.

Through work on -- the production of a family food supply; on organized marketing by the farm women themselves; information on budgeting of funds; keeping of household accounts; consumers' education in selection and purchase of foods, clothing, house furnishings and equipment; and on other home demonstration activities -- effort is being made to meet the needs of rural people which are within the scope provided by such an educational organization as the home demonstration service.

A pattern of emphasis, however, is found in the home demonstration programs that frequently is at variance with the patterns of needs. The programs, in the areas studied, emphasized work on food and nutrition, clothing, and phases of housing, and house furnishings. These were specific, concrete subjects within the comprehension of the homemaker. They are subjects which, when learned, can usually be applied with very little outlay of money. Also, they are subjects in which the home demonstration agents have been trained and on which they doubtless feel best able to impart information.

Problems involving health, education, community and family life, and recreation received little attention in the home demonstration program. The full potentialities of cooperation with other community agencies -- such as

rural health and welfare services, rural libraries, the rural church, and the rural school -- were far from realization. Although the home demonstration program should continue working with definite, concrete subjects, such as food, clothing, and house furnishings, its failure to cover these other important factors of rural life cannot be regarded with equanimity and may account for its failure to reach the nonparticipating rural homemakers.

Recommendations

These studies have revealed the many and worth-while achievements of a great educational organization serving the rural families of the Nation. But, the discovery of ways and means to improve the program and strengthen the weaknesses as revealed is our chief interest. If the program is to more nearly meet the needs of rural people, a larger proportion of them should be reached. It is therefore recommended that:

1. The broad general objectives of the home demonstration program be broken down in each State into definite statements based on the needs of rural people, and given in terms of operations or functions that would point the way to specific action.
2. More emphasis be given in each State to the study and analysis of State, county, and community situations and needs, and in working out realistic long-time home and community programs to meet them.
3. A broad program should be developed for evaluating the effectiveness of the home demonstration program in meeting State and local needs.
4. The local program should be planned to meet the needs of the entire community -- of the nonparticipants as well as the participants.
5. Every piece of work should be planned with respect to its use in and by the family group and should emphasize family life as a unit.
6. The simple, elementary subjects -- food preparation and preservation, house furnishings, and clothing -- which up to now have received greatest emphasis in home demonstration programs should be related to a greater extent to the broader subjects of health, family welfare, and community life; and should be taught in the light of definite goals. More emphasis needs to be placed on correlating small projects with larger problems and objectives.

7. More emphasis be given to those needs not now being met - such as helping farm families on ways to increase income, major housing problems, health, family life problems, community problems and recreation.
8. Closer cooperation be attained between home demonstration programs and those of other community agencies, such as rural health and welfare, rural churches, rural libraries, and rural schools.

Suggestions for Reaching Rural People

To facilitate reaching rural homemakers, it is recommended that:

1. Groups be organized on a neighborhood basis so that attendance at meetings may be made easier.
2. More local leaders be used and that they be given an opportunity to plan their own rural programs based on felt needs, that they be more adequately trained in discussion, subject matter, organization procedures, and presentation of materials.
3. Teaching methods be adapted to reach the less well-educated homemakers; that each program be related to major needs.
4. Increased emphasis be given to the discussion of issues and rural community problems with key leaders in the community.
5. More emphasis be placed on the newer tools of education such as film strips, movies, and simplified leaflets.

Training of Agents

One of the reasons why relatively little attention is paid at present to the vital human relationship problems of rural people is the lack of knowledge of these subjects on part of the home demonstration agents. To enrich the home demonstration program to the point where it will meet the needs of the rural people, it is recommended that:

1. Home Demonstration Agents, in addition to being trained in the traditional phases of home economics, be further trained in child development and family relationships, and in psychology, economics, education, and sociology.
2. The number of home demonstration agents be tripled so there may be sufficient county personnel to reach all rural homemakers (at present each agent works with an average of 900 rural families).
3. The number of supervisors of home demonstration work be greatly increased so that agents may be more adequately supervised.

A Brief Review of Studies Related to Home Demonstration Work up to 1936.

A brief review of related studies related to Home Demonstration Work up to 1936, brings out the following facts: Effectiveness of methods has been studied. All studies were done by personal interview. Adoption of recommended practices was the measure of effectiveness. In all studies over one-third of the farm homes had adopted practices advocated. In the adoption of practices the education of the homemaker and her participation in extension activities had great influence in changing practices. The method demonstration was found to be the most used teaching device and was credited with over 40 percent of all home economics practices adopted.

The factors influential in determining frequency of change in practice were education of homemaker and membership in home demonstration clubs and contact with extension workers. The studies covering the reasons for nonparticipation revealed that they were basically the same throughout diverse areas; Lack of transportation, no one to care for small children, and poor health were most frequently given.

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